

News Release

Senator Pete V. Domenici

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MAY 2, 2000

DOMENICI: "REJECT FAILED EDUCATION POLICIES AND EMBRACE VISIONARY REFORMS"

U.S. Senate Debates Primary Federal Education Bill

WASHINGTON -- Senator Pete Domenici today urged all Americans to reject the failed education policies of the past, and embrace visionary reforms aimed at increasing student achievement and making teachers and schools more accountable.

Domenici today touted the reforms during Senate debate on legislation to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the primary law setting policy for federal involvement in public education.

Domenici will offer two amendments to the bill, one to dramatically expand federal support for the Character Counts program, and the other to make Charter School Districts - newly available in New Mexico - eligible for federal funding. Domenici said the amendments are based, in part, on input he received from New Mexico educators in Albuquerque last month.

"My experience when I recently met with school superintendents and educators from across New Mexico was that they want more flexibility and freedom to decide how to use federal education dollars at the local level," Domenici said. "With this legislation on the Senate floor, we provide state and local educators and parents with a menu of choices to improve child learning and failing schools."

"The old arguments and failed education policies supported by the Democrats aren't working anymore. The Republican reforms proposed in this bill would raise accountability and evaluate performance based on what kids learn, not on how much money is thrown at federal education bureaucrats. These proposals put parents and local educators in the drivers seat in terms of making schools better for our children," he said.

Domenici plans to offer two amendments to the ESEA:

- **Charter School Districts Amendment:** Domenici will offer an amendment to make Charter School Districts eligible for federal funding. A 1999 New Mexico law created a pilot program allowing all 89 school districts in New Mexico to increase their flexibility by applying for

Charter School District status. Domenici's amendment would make them eligible for federal funds, as only individual Charter Schools are currently eligible.

- **Character Counts Amendment:** Domenici, a long-time advocate of the Character Counts program, will offer an amendment to greatly expand the federal contribution to character education. The Domenici amendment would increase the Funding for the Improvement of Education account to \$150 million, carving out \$50 million of that funding specifically for character education programs like Character Counts.

"The Charter School concept is an exciting proposition that gives public schools freedom from many of the regulations that apply to traditional public schools. My amendment will provide New Mexico schools that choose the flexibility of Charter School District status an avenue to seek federal resources," Domenici said.

"In the same vein, character education is providing local educators and parents with the tools to help instill principles in children that lead to greater student achievement," he said.

The new ESEA bill will determine how New Mexico's 89 school districts can use the millions of dollars provided by Congress to support and improve public education. This year the state can expect to receive about \$285 million in federal education funding, compared with \$272 million K-12 funding in FY1999.

The ESEA bill, Domenici said, is built around increasing local control over the use of federal education funding, increasing accountability from teachers and students, and building on parental empowerment and the right to know. The bill is designed to offer states and school districts a menu of options to choose from that best fit their needs, including:

Straight A's (Title VI, Part H)

- ***Optional*** 15 state demonstration program where in exchange for greater accountability, states will gain freedom from red tape and federal regulations through the consolidation of up to 13 formula grant programs. Accountability system is results-based with success being measured by student achievement and not simply the amount of money spent or the number of students served.

Performance Partnerships (Title VI, Part G)

- Similar to Straight A's but all 50 states are eligible to participate. States must continue to target Title I funds to the highest poverty schools, and the Secretary of Education has greater authority in approving a state's application.

Rural Flexibility Act (Title VI, Part B)

- “Rural Flex” would allow small, rural school districts to combine funds for the purposes of improving student achievement and the quality of instruction. Rural districts generally have such small student populations, they often do not receive enough funding under a formula grant to carry out grant programs. School districts with fewer than 600 students are exempted from several formula requirements, giving them the flexibility to target federal funds so that they best meet school districts needs.

Child-Centered Program / Title I Portability (Subpart 3 of Title I)

- 10 States and 20 School Districts in exchange for rigorous accountability could switch their current Title I funding mechanism from school-based funding to a child centered approach. Interested states and districts can provide grants directly to needy children, which follow them to whatever public school they attend.

Public School Choice (Title I, Section 16)

- Requires a school district designated as failing for 2 years to offer a student enrolled in a Title I school the option to transfer to another higher performing public school. Additionally, if the school continues to fail for another 2 years the school district would also be responsible for covering the costs of transportation of those students attending another school. Currently, over 7,000 Title I schools have been identified as failing.
- Students attending Title I schools who either have been a victim of a violent crime on school grounds or whose school has been designated unsafe may also transfer to another public school.

Teacher Empowerment Act (TEA)

- Creates a new State Teacher Development grant program with a substantially larger pot of money (\$2 billion for FY 2001) by combining all of the funds from the Eisenhower Professional Development Program and the Class Size Reduction Initiative to provide maximum flexibility to states and locals in search of high-quality teachers. The focus of the new grant program is on the long-term and sustained development of teachers and it also includes professional development for administrators and principals.